

SOAR into the new year with art and recreation

Youth flourish when art, music and recreation are in their lives. Those endeavors are invaluable, and usually come with a high price tag. However, young people in foster care or receiving adoption or guardianship subsidies can explore a variety of free cultural and recreational activities that will enhance their lives.

Project S.O.A.R. (Statewide Opportunities for Art and Recreation) is sponsored by DCFS to bring free classes to youth throughout the Cook County regions. Classes include music, art, media, dance and drama, and are conducted weekly to coincide with the school calendar. Youth ages 3 to 18 who are currently under DCFS care or who left through adoption or guardianship arrangements can enroll in classes.

"It is important that our children have the same chance to experience art and recreation, just as any other child would. Being in care is by its very nature tough. This is one way caregivers can help normalize the situation and bring some good out of it," said DCFS Acting Director Erwin McEwen.

Beyond DCFS, educators and legislators believe in the power of the arts to transform children's

lives. The National Governor's Association in 2002 said in a workforce report: "For at-risk youth, that segment of society most likely to suffer from limited lifetime productivity, the arts contribute to lower recidivism rates; increased self-esteem; the acquisition of job skills; and the development of much needed creative thinking, problem solving and communications skills."

Over several years, the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services has forged relationships with art, cultural and recreational programs to bring families educational opportunities through S.O.A.R. Top-notch instructors from respected arts organizations present a wide range of engaging programs to build excitement for the arts. Youth can register for one course each session from the offerings below:

- After-School in the Arts
- Ballet
- Percussion
- BlackEnsemble/New Directions
- Photography
- Clarinet
- Piano
- Children's Choir
- Project Butterfly
- Chorus
- Drum Classes



- Dance
- Teen Program
- Clarinet
- Tumbling
- Dance Forms
- Violin
- Discover Music/Discover Life
- Visual Art
- Flute

A new session begins on January 21 and runs until May 16. Registration is by phone only (no voice mail) at 312-814-4145, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. The registration period is December 3rd through the 14th. Transportation is provided based on need, availability, class location and transportation guidelines. Upon registration, please ask for details.

PRIDE training goes digital with new computerized services

The DCFS Office of Training announced that it will soon offer the in-service PRIDE training modules as an interactive CD-ROM format in addition to the traditional classroom format. The digital format will provide any-time, anywhere use, allowing caregivers to receive training, while working around the other responsibilities that compete to for their time.

The nine in-service modules in PRIDE Digital Curriculum use the same combination of co-trainers that are featured in all the PRIDE classroom training programs. A child welfare professional and a foster parent professional guide at-home learners through each module. Using video and an easy-to-use computer format, the computerized course presents the information and recorded discussions from other caregivers, adopted individuals and agency staff with knowledge of Illinois' child welfare system. The digital system takes learners through exercises to test their understanding of the material. It saves exercises so caregivers can document their work for each module.

DCFS continues to work with Governor's State University on this project and the plans for making the digital courseware widely available. Details will be included on the training pages of future issues of this newsletter. Contact Jean Maher of the DCFS Office training at 217-524-3539 for more information.

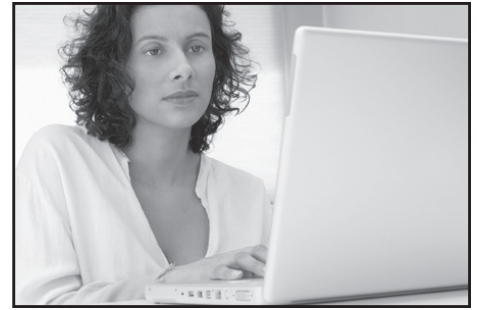
Virtual Training Center offers on-line convenience

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is a new on-line learning resource center from the Office of DCFS Training. All caregivers, DCFS or private agency staff or other child welfare partners will be able to access the on-line training center through the Internet at www.dcfstraining.org. All training registration, current schedules, updated announcements, training transcripts, and learning resources (including the foster parent library), will ultimately be available on-line in the center. The Department is asking each licensed caregiver with both the Department and the private child welfare agencies to register for a VTC account.

With a VTC account, caregivers can see their own transcripts at any time, search for the most up-to-date schedules of classes available, and even search the foster parent library for resources. It will save time by allowing caregivers to register for training on-line using a computer. It will also make it easier for the Department to communicate updates through e-mail.

To start a VTC account, all users need to complete a VTC Training Account form, which only takes a few minutes.

1. Go to the VTC Web site, look in announcements section, and click on the link to the form.



Users can fill it out on-line and submit via e-mail, **or**

2. Complete the form on-line, print it, and fax to the Registration Unit at 217-782-9301, **or**
3. Contact the DCFS Registration Unit at 877-800-3393, and they will e-mail the form. For caregivers who don't have e-mail, the Unit can mail the form or complete it by telephone.

Even caregivers that do not have access to the Internet are still being asked to complete the personal account form to ensure an accurate training profile for them is included in the DCFS database.

The Registration Unit and toll free number 1-877-800-3393 will still be operational after the VTC has been activated. However, the VTC is the gateway to training schedules, on-line registration, accessing your transcripts, and taking on-line classes.

If you have questions, contact Mary Ochman-Ahmed by e-mail at Mary.Ochman-Ahmed@Illinois.gov or by phone, at 217-785-5689.

Cook South gets ready for COA review

Cook South has started its preparations for review by the Council on Accreditation (COA). To get staff and caregivers energized for what will be an intense review process, Michael Byrd, Regional Administrator hosted an enthusiastic kickoff meeting in October. The Harvey office was buzzing with excitement fueled by music, spoken word poetry, and refreshments.

Cook South is gearing up to be reaccruited in its upcoming third review period, which stretches for nearly 18 months. To meet COA standards, the region must undergo scrutiny of its mission, resources and culture, as well as the unique needs and aspirations of the people it serves. Reviewers will go through case files, interview staff and meet with some caregivers and parents. The process looks at the entire organization's governance, management and service delivery. It determines if the organization meets standards in areas that include: ethical practice, financial management, client rights, training and many other specific service areas.

Cook South has successfully been accredited and reaccruited once. Many of the recognition events and support programs that the region provides to caregivers and parents also shore up the compliance with COA standards. Recent trainings such as CPR and first aid at the Emerald office are further evidence of the strides the region is making toward meeting



Regional Administrator Michael Byrd explains the importance of the upcoming COA review.

the COA standards while meeting the needs of caregivers and families. Many of the support groups and caregiver organizations will be involved in COA-related activities or trainings. These groups also offer training credits to caregivers.

Cook South Emerald

- Meets the second Tuesday of the month at 10 a.m.
- Contact Elise Worrell at 773-371-6114

Cook South Harvey

- Meets the fourth Thursday of the month at 10 a.m.
- Contact Doris Paul at 708-210-3594 for Adrienne Taylor.

Northeast Area Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

- Meets the third Thursday of the month at 10 a.m. at the Sherman Park Library
- Contact Donsetta Blakely at 773-778-7445

From the Cook South RA

Our Acting Director Erwin McEwen tells us that we are "standing on a critical line." On one side are those families who don't need their children removed, but need assistance to stabilize their condition. On the other side are those homes where we must remove the children so they can be safe. As caregivers, you faithfully walk that line as well.

I would like to acknowledge the Holiday Season to all of you who feverishly and fearlessly open your homes and your hearts to children. I and the staff at Cook South appreciate that we have caregivers who truly care. Without your efforts we could not provide appropriate, permanent families as quickly as possible for those children who cannot safely be at home.

Sometimes, when I when I look at the number of abuse cases and what our families are facing everyday, it gives me reason to pause. But everyday there is a foster parent attempting to be a balm to heal a child's soul. That knowledge keeps me as driven as you are to effect change in the lives of others.

My hope for you is that the Spirit of the Season will give you joy where there was sorrow and hope in the place of any despair. I wish that the Spirit of the Season will restore you and energize you for the new year.

*Michael Byrd,
Cook South Regional Administrator*

Message from the Cook Central RA

As the Regional Administrator of the Cook Central Region, I am honored to work with the caregiver community in support of our children who deserve so very much. Our caregivers give so much and go so far to meet the needs of the families that we serve.

This holiday season is one of the most special times of the year. The family traditions, spiritual meaning, surprise gifts and appetizing dishes, can all make lasting memories. But for some children and even for some adults, this holiday season can bring on feelings of anxiety and longing as our children remember their birth families or other close ties from which they might be separated. Our foster parents do an indescribable and a remarkable job of meeting the needs of children—children who many times can't even articulate what their feelings may be. I applaud our Cook Central caregivers who make personal sacrifices to ensure that our children don't lack for the material as well as the extra emotional support that they might need during this time.

I wish the best for you during these special days and I salute you, the caregivers, for your demonstrated skills, abilities, and accomplishments while working with the most deserving members of our society: our children.

Joyce E. Hall, LCSW, Cook Central Regional Administrator

Cook Central has new children's playroom

DCFS staff at the 3518 W. Division Street office banded together to make a playroom for children. The unit led by Marnita Harris developed a child-friendly area for their team to use when they bring children to the office. Caseworkers Latanya Green, Alicia McCree, Ella Smith, and Rosalind Wierkerson and their supervisor purchased the decorations and items for the room. The Chicago Park District, the DCFS integrated assessment team and Mason and Kellmen elementary schools also donated items. They celebrated their contribution with an open house in August.

Now the walls in the area are decorated with colorful signs and posters in English and Spanish. There is a child size wooden table and four wooden chairs where the children can sit down to read, color and play games. There are an additional four blue steel stackable chairs for extra visitors. The rug is an interlocking pattern of squares with numbers that can be taken apart and re-arranged in different patterns. These squares and numbers are in different colors of blue, green, yellow, and orange.

The room has a stand that holds a TV, VCR, and radio. They also have a kid's computer for the children to use. There are drawers filled with paper, pencils, crayons, and



Items donated by Cook Central staff and other organizations make the new playroom an inviting haven.

notebook paper, plus a computer. Shelves are filled with books to read for all ages, coloring books, coloring paper, games, and other school supplies. There is also an extra book bag for the children to use.

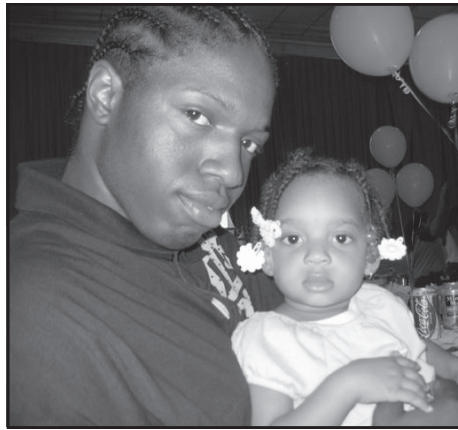
"We are on the look out for more toys to serve a wider range of ages. It is still a work in progress," said Harris.

Already, many children have found joy within the walls of the new playroom. The unit that Harris supervises does child protection investigations. If a child must leave his home and has to spend time at the DCFS office, the play area is practical and therapeutic.

Questions about the playroom or additional donations can be directed to Marnita Harris at 773-292-7700.

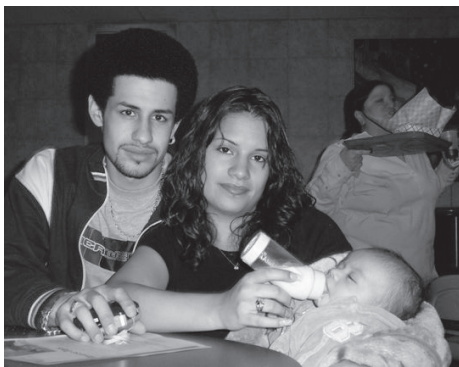
Cook Central resource supports young fathers, teen moms, and kids

Christopher House Agency launched the Forum for Young Fathers in September. The support group meets Wednesday evenings from 6:30–8:30 at 2507 N. Greenview (near Fullerton and Ashland). This is an open-ended group for teen fathers and young fathers up to the age 25. It's free and open to fathers in the Humboldt Park, Logan Square, Avondale, Uptown, Lincoln Square, Lakeview, Albany Park, North Center, Irving Park, West Town, and Edgewater neighborhoods.



Young fathers come together for discussion and encouragement at the Christopher House support group for young men.

Each week, fathers discuss new topics. Weekly topics might include parenting, pre/post natal infant development, STDs, and ways to discipline children. The group members also suggest topics. The meetings include a meal, sport activities as well as the education/discussion groups. Transportation can also be provided in the form of transit cards. For information call Charlie Burt at 773-679-7928.



The Christopher House agency reaches out to help teen parents raise their children successfully.

Christopher House also hosts a Teen Mom group for pregnant teens ages 13 to 19. This program includes parenting classes and a GED class for the moms. Gear Up for College is available for students in the 8th through the 12th grades. This helps the students prepare for college with the application process as well as other preparatory activities. A daycare program is available for 2 to 5 year olds from 7:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. An after school program to 5:30 p.m. can serve 45 to 60 children. The after school and daycare programs have a sliding fee scale. Other free programs include after school tutoring, adult literacy classes, and family literacy classes for the parents and children. Another Christopher House site recently opened in Logan Square at the intersection of Sawyer and Altgeld streets. For more information about Christopher House call 773-472-1083.

Cook Central girls open eyes to new opportunities

The Brown Eyed Girl is a free program for girls ages 6 to 14 in the foster care system. Girls participate in hands-on activities centered on education, empowerment, exposure, and engagement. Each of the 8-week sessions focuses on broadening their horizons through various activities and community involvement.

Girls who live in the Austin, North Lawndale, Forest Park, and Oak Park communities are eligible to participate in this program.

Gwen Rodez, co-founder and senior director of Brown Eyed Girl, spoke about the program with the foster parent advisory council. She described past projects and activities including a dance camp, photography classes, and a sex and health education program. Girls also had lunch at the American Girl restaurant, attended a performance of the Joffrey Ballet, took cooking classes, and attended a weekend camping trip. Girls who participated in the photography and media project had their photo exhibit on foster care showcased at the Austin Public Library.

The founder of Brown Eyed Girl, Augusta Bryant, has encouraged and supported girls from all ethnic groups to participate in the program. For information about the program or enrollment inquiries, phone Gwen Rodez at 866-319-3530.

From the Cook North RA

Happy Holidays! It was an active year in the Cook North Region. One of the biggest changes was my new role of acting regional administrator. Together, we can look back on many successful efforts designed to make the foster parents and adoptive families feel respected and appreciated.

This past fall, we held a back-to-school event so families could receive free school supplies and winter outerwear for youth. We conducted several focus groups with caregivers to get input on the region's Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan, due in December. That plan will guide our policies and practices as we uphold the Foster Parent Law. Already, we established a new practice guide detailing how we will share information when a child is placed in your home, in accordance with the Law. We will mail copies of the plan to all the homes supervised by DCFS in Cook North.

In the New Year please look forward to more regional training and more opportunities to share your input. Our advisory council is open to all DCFS and private agency caregivers in the region. The council meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 10:30 a.m. at 1911 S. Indiana. Please do join us. If you have any questions about the region, please contact my office at 312-329-2507.

Jackie Bright, Acting Cook North Regional Administrator

Online holiday activities keep kids busy

With children home for the holidays, it helps to have a few tricks up your sleeve to keep minds sharp and hands busy. Take a look at these websites for ways to learn about cultures and crafts during the holiday break from school.

Countdown to Christmas

You can send e-cards, write to Santa, find recipes and print holiday coloring sheets at www.northpole.com

Chanukah on the net

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, is a Jewish celebration of the victory of the Maccabees and the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple. It also commemorates the miracle of the oil that burned for 8 days. This year the holiday is celebrated December 4 to December 12. Learn about the tradition and ways to celebrate at www.holidays.net/chanukah.

Exploring Kwanzaa

Learn the background and basics of the Kwanzaa celebration, which runs December 26 through January 1. Founder Dr. Maulana Karenga shares information on all of the elements of this African-American tradition celebrating family, culture and community at www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org

Holiday crafts

Fill the school-free days with crafts that are easy to do with kids. Find ideas for Christmas decorations, ornaments, gifts and edible crafts. At crafts.kaboose.com/holidays,

there are hundreds of ideas to keep idle little hands busy.

Holiday Homework

Print out math worksheets that celebrate holiday fun as they teach. The sheets use winter themes and graphics to quiz basic math skills. Sheets that vary by grade level and the type of math activity are ready to print at www.kidzone.ws/math/winter.

Cook County Advocate reporters

Cook South ~ Rod Mulford

773-371-6350 office
773-371-6065 fax
Rod.Mulford@illinois.gov
6201 S. Emerald, Chicago, IL 60621

Cook North ~ Jackie Bright

312-328-2505 office
312-328-2688 fax
Jackie.Bright@illinois.gov
1911 S. Indiana, Chicago, IL 60616

Cook Central ~

Merrylee Guge-Jorgensen

773-292-7700 office
773-292-7861 fax
Merrylee.Guge-Jorgensen@illinois.gov
3518 W. Division, Chicago, IL 60651

Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Get ready to celebrate the holidays in Chicago and beyond

Find the perfect tree

Take the family out for a winter adventure as you seek the perfect live Christmas tree. The University of Illinois Extension maintains a list of tree farms throughout the state, into Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin. Check the Web site www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/trees to search the directory and find many fun holiday craft and food ideas.

City of Chicago Christkindlmarket

Embrace the warm sounds of holiday music, enjoy a visit with Santa Claus, and shop at the Christkindlmarket, all at Daley Plaza during the holidays. Families can get an up-close view of Chicago's massive 90-foot-tall holiday tree, which is comprised of more than 130 smaller Balsam Fir trees illuminated with thousands of lights and hundreds of ornaments.

In addition, Santa's "workshop" will have a newly renovated home on the Plaza at the base of the tree for the holiday season. Every day starting November 22 through December 24, Santa will be available for pictures and taking wish lists. Visits with Santa run through December 23, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and on December 24 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Please note Santa takes a break each day from 3 p.m. - 4 p.m.)

The 12th Annual Christkindlmarket is inspired by German Christmas traditions. It offers exquisite handmade gifts, unique orna-

ments, rare European fabrics and textiles and the opportunity to devour German delicacies like brats, goulash, potato pancakes, cookies and Gluhwein (a warm spiced wine). Admission is free. Prices for food and products vary.

Christkindlmarket hours are:

- November 23 to December 23 Mondays through Thursdays 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Friday and Saturday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- Sunday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Monday, December 24 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. - only



Free Holiday Sports Festival

Mayor Daley's Holiday Sports Festival is a free, all ages event during the holiday break. Children can enjoy interactive zones with air hockey, golf, climbing walls, football, skills area, chess, obstacle course, tot's zone, bowling, martial arts, table tennis, inflatable tumbling, tennis, badminton, boxing, fishing ponds, footbag, giant slide, 50-Yard dash, skateboarding/boarding area, cheerleading clinics, and open courts for volleyball and basketball. Chicago Pub-

lic Schools will host an all-ages chess tournament and there will be instructors on site for beginners.

At the Bulls-Sox Training Academy coaches will be on hand each day to check pitching speed and give pointers on shooting, dribbling and passing. Certified fitness instructors will lead classes in cardio kickboxing, salsa aerobics, pilates, yoga and more! There are fitness demos, lectures on nutrition, bike safety, and family fitness. Essential health screenings will also be available, including body fat composition measurements. Personal trainers can guide you through a personalized fitness regime.

The complete schedule of activities will be available on the city's Web site in December. Admission to interactive zones and the biggest indoor gym is free. Activities take place daily, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, December 28 through Sunday, December 30 at McCormick Place in Halls A & B (2301 S. Martin Luther King Drive)

New Year's Eve Fireworks at Buckingham Fountain

Bring the New Year in with a bang and have an up-close look at the City of Chicago's spectacular fireworks display. The plaza at Buckingham Fountain (Congress at Columbus) will be the best spot to view the fireworks against the city sky, along with a fountain light show. Crowds begin to gather after 10 p.m. and the fireworks begin at 11:40 p.m.

Cook Region Training Calendar

Foster PRIDE In-Service Modules

All caregivers are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Training. Advance registration is required. Training dates, times and locations are subject to change.

Cook North

Module 2 - Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs (9 training hours)

Chicago *DCFS, 1911 S. Indiana*
Feb. 21, 26, 28 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Module 7 - Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity (6 training hours)

Chicago *Irish American Center*
Jan. 15 & 17 (Tue/Thu) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Module 11 - The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment (6 training hours)

Chicago *DCFS, 1911 S. Indiana*
Jan. 26 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Chicago *Irish American Center*
Feb. 25 & 27 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Module 12 - Understanding and Promoting Preteen and Teen Development (6 training hours)

Chicago *DCFS, 1911 S. Indiana*
Jan. 29 & 31 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Chicago *Irish American Center*
Feb. 4 & 6 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Cook Central

Module 2 - Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs (9 training hours)

Chicago *DCFS, 3518 W. Division*
Jan. 31, Feb. 5, 7 (Thu/Tue) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Cook South

Module 2 - Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs (9 training hours)

Chicago *Hull House*
Jan. 14, 16, 21 (M/W) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Chicago *DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald*
Feb. 6, 13, 20 (Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Module 3/4 - The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (9 training hours)

Chicago *Hull House*
Feb. 4, 6, 11 (M/W) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Module 6 - Working as a Professional Team Member (9 training hours)

Chicago *DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald*
Jan. 19 (Sat) and 9:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.
Jan. 26 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Module 9 - Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family (6 training hours)

Chicago *DCFS Office*
6201 S. Emerald
Dec. 8 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Module 11 - The Teen in Foster Care: Supporting Attachment (6 training hours)

Harvey *DCFS Office*
Jan. 12 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Module 12 - Understanding and Promoting Preteen and Teen Development (6 training hours)

Harvey *DCFS, 15115 Dixie Hwy.*
Jan. 19 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Educational Advocacy

6 training hrs.

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

Cook North

Chicago *Association House*
(SPANISH)
March 15 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Cook Central

Chicago *UCAN*
Feb. 19 & 21 (Tue/Thu) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Oak Park *Hephzibah*
Dec. 8 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Cook South

Chicago *SOS Children's Village*
Jan. 9 & 10 (Wed/Thu) 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

Chicago *DCFS, 6201 S. Emerald*
Feb. 16 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Caregivers must register to attend any of these training classes.

Call the DCFS Office of Training

877-800-3393
toll free